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FRENCH FAÏENCE



In the Hoentschel Collection—partly given, partly lent, it will be remembered, by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan in 1907—the French decorative arts of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, with the exception of the ceramic arts, are splendidly illustrated. The Museum's own collections in a limited way supplied this deficiency as far as the later French periods were concerned; but in the earlier periods, and particularly in the field of faïence, the exhibition in the new Wing of Decorative Arts has been lamentably weak. This gap has now been filled in an admirable way through the kindness of Mr. Morgan in lending to the Museum the famous collection of French faïence, brought together by the distinguished connoisseur, M. LeBreton—a collection highly important from the æsthetic as well as from the archæological point of view. Following a policy already outlined for the arrangement of the rooms in the Wing of Decorative Arts, this collection has been divided according to the periods of style represented in it, and is now on exhibition in the several galleries into which it falls.

The examples of faïence manufactured at Rouen, a city distinguished for its faïence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, form the most important part of this collection and in themselves constitute a collection unequaled in any other public gallery, with the exception, perhaps, of the Rouen Museum. Not only Rouen, however, but the factories next in impor-

tance, Moustiers, Nevers, and Strassbourg, are also represented by choice pieces. The early pieces in the collection are especially valuable for the study of the beginnings of French pottery in the sixteenth century.

This early French pottery of the sixteenth century, influenced as it was by the art of different countries—that is, of Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands—appears under a varied aspect. But one prominent figure stands out in this period, Bernard Palissy, whose glazed pottery, with that of his followers, shows the influence of the Nuremberg manufactures. In the LeBreton Collection, several openwork plates show his characteristic manner. A jug mounted with a silver cover bearing the arms of the Mailly family is especially interesting, as it may be one of Palissy's first attempts. Two large jugs made at Avignon toward the end of the sixteenth century show the influence of Rhenish earthenware. An unusual cup with handle made of the green glazed earth of Savignies (near Beauvais) imitates the form of the cups enameled at Limoges.

The influence of Italian majolica is marked in the examples which show the first attempts at painted faïence in France. This is not strange, as several Italians worked at Lyons and at Nîmes with the early French potters, and the rare plates which are ascribed to the factory of Lyons differ scarcely at all from the well-known Urbino ware. Further illustration of this point is afforded by a richly colored vase made at Nîmes exactly imitating a Faenza piece. At Rouen the first important manufacturer of faïence worked quite in the Italian style. This potter was Masseot Abaquesne (about 1540), who executed tiles for several châteaux around Rouen. Examples of these tiles from the Châteaux of La Bâtisse en Forez, D'Anet, and d'Ecouen are in the collection, as well as several

atharelli by Masseot and Laurent Abaquesne.

After the Abaquesnes, the manufacture of faïence languished for nearly a century, to start up anew, about 1640, under the activity of Edme Poterat, who, with his son, produced the first of that splendid series of Rouen plates, decorated in the style of Louis XIV, that brought fame and prosperity to the Rouen potters.

The best period in the production of this famous ware is comprised in the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth. Nearly a hundred and fifty pieces in the LeBreton collection date from this time. They include examples of practically all the different shapes that were produced: small plates, large dinner dishes, platters, vases, helmet-shaped ewers, inkstands, etc. The evolution of styles is also well illustrated in this unusually fine group of Rouen ware. Perhaps the most tasteful and typically French is the pattern with lambrequins "or arabesques in geometrical radiation" as used by the Poterats. Following this, patterns in Chinese style (about 1700-1720) were introduced by Guillibaud. Several of Guillibaud's signed pieces are included in our collection. The richly colored patterns *en rocaille* of the Louis XV period succeeded these, and in the latest works the decoration of Rouen ware imitates the pottery made at Strassbourg.

The delicate designs on the faïence of Moustiers are especially typical of the Louis XV period. The work of Olerys in this manufacture is characterized by the use of two colors, green and yellow. Berain, designing in imitation of the antique Pompeian wall decorations, makes use of blue and white for his colors. Good examples of the work of both these artists, are on exhibition, as well as of the Nevers faïence with decorations in white on dark blue or yellow ground, and of the Strassbourg ware influenced by German porcelain. It is possible in this note only to mention finally the smaller factories which are represented in the collection: Apt, Niederwiller, Sceaux, Valenciennes, Lunéville.

W. R. V.

AN ALTARPIECE BY TADDEO GADDI

IN the central panel of this fine altarpiece sits the Virgin enthroned, while two angels hold a cloth of honor behind her and the mischievous Christ-Child (a type dating from late Byzantine times) tugs at her kerchief. In the right-hand panels stand St. James with his pilgrim's staff and the protomartyr, St. Stephen, bearing a palm and wearing, as usual, rich deacon's robes. In the left-hand panels stand St. John the Baptist, carrying a cross and pointing to the Child with the gesture meaning, "Behold the Lamb of God," and St. Laurence, clothed as a deacon and bearing the gridiron as emblematic of his martyrdom. The composition, uniting, as it does, personages of several centuries, is a mystical one. The figures are set upon the conventional gold background, which is beautifully toned by age; and, except in the massive marble throne and the bit of desert rock under the feet of the Baptist, no attempt is made to give a realistic setting.

Originally this polyptych was in Gothic form. It surely had small pictures in its five pinnacles, and, presumably, five oblong pictures in the base (*predella*).

About a century and a half after its painting the altarpiece was cut down and reframed in the taste of the late fifteenth century. Then it received a frame of Corinthian type, while, to replace the old Gothic moldings, painted pilasters with an arabesque design were introduced between the panels. To fill the spandrels caused by the reframing, some weak imitator of Ghirlandaio added half-length figures of the four Evangelists with their symbols. Through these changes the altarpiece has lost its Gothic aspect; but the main panels are intact, the tempera colors brilliant in spite of some darkening, the gilding and pounced work of the finest, and the whole relatively free from restoration. It is now so difficult to get an important polyptych with its chief panels complete that the Museum is to be congratulated on securing a piece whose alterations constitute, after all, an interesting part of its history.